THE LULU SESSIONS

A feature documentary by S. Casper Wong

PRESS KIT

5.1.14

S. Casper Wong
OO Media, LLC
P.O. Box 638
New York, NY 10272
+1.212.766.8868
oo@oomedia.com
www.thelulusessionsfilm.com
Reviews

“A Must-see Documentary… LuLu will absolutely charm you precisely because she is not trying to.”
- LA Weekly

“Unexpected humor and self reflection… are recorded with raw immediacy. Asian and LGBT fests will line up for this audience puller.”
- Variety

“Highly Recommended… Moments of reflection and angst become all the more poignant because of the film’s humor and frequently celebratory tone”
- About.com

“But relationship, and not cancer, is the heartbeat of the film. LuLu’s deep and engaging friendship with Casper is a testament to love and how powerful and influential another person can be in our lives.”
- Psychology Today

“LuLu’s feisty nature, humour, language, determination to maximise her time by making every day an adventure and her love towards Casper cannot fail to win you over.”
- The Lancet Oncology

“It’s a beautifully stark testimony about the tenacity of love and enduring friendship, and it offers a sort of raw, honest, and, yes, funny, look at mortality.”
- SheWired

“It’s showcasing the intimacies of this remarkable friendship that seems so nuanced and lovely. This isn’t just a story about cancer, it’s a story about love.”
- After Ellen

“At its core The LuLu Sessions is a completely unconventional love story – an intimate and deeply personal portrait of two people confronting a terminal illness with honesty, laughter and love.”
- Q Doc

“Remarkable story of cancer researcher facing her own diagnosis”
- The Record

“It’s the story of two women, but it’s a universal story. So. Go see it.”
- The Lady Garden

“Wong and Nutter embark on a wonderful, brave, and often touching journey… humor carries the film”
- Edge
“Wong is not only a sensitive and perceptive filmmaker…this film is a story you won’t soon forget.”
- DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival - WINNER George C. Lin Emerging Filmmaker Award; WINNER Best Documentary Feature

“It’s hard to think of a fiction film without death or love. Yet when it comes to documentary, these are perhaps the uncanniest, most tenuous topics of all, ones that defy the genre of realism precisely because we have such a hard time believing that they are real to begin with.

A piercing work of personal documentary, THE LULU SESSIONS has no illusions about such topics, yet brings us to the brink of grasping both.”
- San Diego Asian American Film Festival – WINNER Special Jury Award

” Something intensely magical is captured on screen…The Lulu Sessions is a magnificent, emotional film that refuses to shy away from the sad, unsightly realities of death and, specifically, death by cancer. But there is far more to this moving documentary than sadness and death. Tenderly revealed is the inexplicable beauty, calmness, clarity and truth that can emerge from the depths of something so painful. In all things dark, so there is light, and The Lulu Sessions masters a strong depiction of both.”
- Toronto LGBT Film Festival - WINNER Second Place in Audience Award Competition for Best Documentary

“It earned this distinction (of Opening Night Film) entirely on its own merits. This is a film that will get under your skin and you will wear this out of the theater and take it home with you…This is a film that I experienced frame by frame. I watch films to make a connection. The films that mean the most to me are ones that feel real and compelling. This one touched me in ways that are difficult to describe in mere words.”
- Austin GLBT Film Festival – Opening Night Film

“The Lulu Sessions offers us insight not only into a deeply connected relationship but the beginning of an intimacy between two women that outgrows our understanding of friendship and partnership – and maybe even life. The Lulu Sessions is not only a work about limits, but, at least for many moments, their very suspension.”
- LA Asian Pacific American Film Festival – Nominated for the Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary

“Lulu is one of the greatest documentary subjects I’ve ever seen on film. The film reminds me a lot of Silverlake Life.”
- Doug Block, Director of 51 Birch Street, The Kids Grow Up

“Lulu is an unforgettable character! Full of passion and spitfire. I couldn’t stop watching even though I had a mountain of films to screen.”
- Debra Zimmerman, Executive Director, Women Make Movies
Interviews

S. Casper Wong's interview on Vermont Public Radio with Jane Lindholm
- Documentary Follows Final Year Of Researcher's Life

S. Casper Wong's Interview at the LA Asian American Film Festival
- LA Asian American Film Festival

S. Casper Wong – Activits & Filmmaker
- A List Magazine

The LuLu Sessions on the Stupid Cancer Show
- Cancer in Film – Part Deux

The LuLu Sessions – S. Casper Wong interview by Host – Diane Bailey
- NCRA – WINGS Radio

Q&A with the San Diego Asian American Film Festival
- Q&A with the San Deigo Asian Film Festival

The LuLu Sessions on IMRU, Radio Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Asian American Film Festival

The LuLu Sessions interview with S. Casper Wong – Asian Cinevision -Cinevue
- Asian CineVision – Cinevue

The LuLu Sessions interview with S. Casper Wong
- Sing Tao Daily

Awards and Nominations

WINNER of Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature – Chicago LGBT Film Festival
WINNER of Best Documentary Feature - DC Asian Pacific Film Festival
WINNER of the George E. Lin Emerging Director Award – DC Asian Pacific Film Festival
WINNER of Emerging Director Award – Asian American International Film Festival
WINNER of Special Jury Award – San Diego Asian Film Festival
WINNER of Audience Award for Best Feature Documentary, 2nd Place – Toronto LGBT Film Festival

Opening Night Film – Austin LGBT Film Festival

NOMINEE of Best Documentary Feature – Copenhagen LGBT Film Festival – MIX Copenhagen

NOMINEE of Best Documentary Feature - Boston LGBT Film Festival

NOMINEE of Best Documentary Feature – LA Asian American International Film Festival
Title: The LuLu Sessions
Genre: Feature documentary
Producer / Director: S. Casper Wong
Running time: 86 min
Format: Digibeta, 4:3, stereo
Color and B&W, English
Completion date: April 2011
Production Company: OO Media, LLC, USA
Website: www.thelulusessionsfilm.com
Contact: oo@oomedia.com
+1.212.766.8868
Distributor: Women Make Movies, OO Media
US Theatrical premiere: Los Angeles, April 2011
US Broadcast premiere: PBS America Reframed, World Channel, March 2014

Production photos available at www.thelulusessionsfilm.com

I Logline

Two best friends taking on life’s ultimate adventure.

They say love knows no bleeping boundaries.

II Short Synopsis

LuLu is unlike anyone you’ve ever met. A hard-living, chain-smoking rebel with a tender heart. A poet with a potty mouth. Farm girl. Former cheerleader. World-class cancer researcher. Beloved professor. Dr. Louise Nutter, or LuLu has just discovered a new anti-cancer drug when she finds out she is dying of breast cancer herself at 42. Shot during those last 15 months of LuLu’s life, The LuLu Sessions is a raw, intimate, yet surprisingly humorous story about the filmmaker showing up for her best friend, and together, testing the limits of their bond while taking on life’s ultimate adventure.

III Synopsis

LuLu is unlike anyone you’ll ever meet.

LuLu gathers friends like a dog gathers fleas. Meet her for a Bud Lite, and you’ll end up snorting beer through your nose, swaying to the jukebox, feeling the inner rebel in you bubbling up. Her cussing puts sailors to shame. She inhales Marlboros like an unsupervised six-year-old devours M&Ms. She downs Double White Russians and Dewar’s straight up.

You wouldn’t guess LuLu, or Dr. Louise Nutter, discovered a groundbreaking antibiotic
anti-cancer drug, the kind of achievement that wins you a Nobel Prize. Or that she started college when she was 15, whizzed through grad school and got her Ph.D in biochem in 3-1/2 years.

She’s a pioneering cancer scientist. Demanding and beloved professor. Amateur poet and novelist. A farm girl. Former cheerleader. Her nicknames include “The Bull” and “Passion Pot.” At her prime at age 42, LuLu gets a phone call: She has end-stage breast cancer. She’ll die 15 months later.

Shot during those last 15 months of LuLu’s life, The LuLu Sessions is a raw, intimate, yet surprisingly humorous story about the filmmaker showing up for her best friend, and together, testing the limits of their bond while taking on life’s ultimate adventure – death.

Despite all of her knowing and bravado, LuLu’s last months are filled with the unexpected. At last, she’s forced to admit her frailties and limitations. A retreat to her childhood farm in Vermont to seek stability and solace explodes into a confrontation with resurrected ghosts. Dying becomes a surprising process of shedding - old presumptions, values and ties and urgently adopting different ones. The quiet and arduous work of making peace in her life has only just begun.

Forcefully vocal and deeply reflective, LuLu makes this last journey accessible and heartfelt in a way that has rarely been seen on screen.

IV Director’s Statement

I’ve been called brave twice in my life. The first time, I left a comfortable, cushy lawyer job and followed my dream of becoming a filmmaker. The second time is after people watch this film.

I certainly never set out to be brave. In the first instance, I was propelled by naivete and a freakish tolerance for uncertainty. In the second, I found myself with footage of the most profound experience of my life. While I had a sense that my story will resonate with others, the biggest hurdle turned out to be me.

Personal documentaries are for some reason, suspect. As Doug Block, one of my heroes in the genre cautions in his Rule Number One on personal doc filmmaking - be prepared to answer: “who the fuck are you to be putting your life up there on screen?!?” It took me seven years to get over myself, and decided that despite humiliation and ridicule lurking ahead, this is a story I had to share. Nonetheless, by the time I started to edit this film, I was still kicking and screaming. Just ask my editor.

Ten years ago, LuLu was my best friend and my ex-something – it’s still hard to say exactly what she was to me. LuLu was like no one you’ve ever met. A hard-living, chain-smoking rebel with a tender heart. A farm girl, a former cheerleader and a master of profanity. A world-class cancer researcher and beloved professor. LuLu -- Dr. Louise
Nutter -- had just discovered a new anti-cancer drug when she found out she was dying of breast cancer herself at 42. Shot during the last 15 months of LuLu’s life, The LuLu Sessions is a raw, intimate, at times humorous story about me showing up for her, and both of us together, testing the limits of our bond while taking on life’s end.

I wasn’t even supposed to be there. I had just started film school in New York. I was headed to shoot a friend’s wedding in San Francisco when LuLu asked me to stop in Minneapolis and go with her to her biopsy. When the bride got cold feet and cancelled the wedding, I ended up staying with LuLu’s and started filming. I caught the moment the oncologist told LuLu her cancer was malignant. Just like that I was in the thick of a crisis, and the footage I’d just shot became the opening sequence of the film.

The next 15 months - LuLu’s last - became an adventure that rattled her assumptions and values and shined a spotlight on the bond between LuLu and me, and its boundaries. Our friendship and our intimacy continued to morph to uncharted places. Later, when Lulu returned to her family farm in Vermont for stability and solace, she had to battle resurrected ghosts instead. Dying became a process of shedding long-held but stale presumptions, obligations and relationships and forging new ones.

In The LuLu Sessions, I’ve tried to explore the transformations that death can hasten. Shooting in the style of cinema verite, I was at once the filmmaker and a character. We tried to live life “normally,” but hardly any of it was normal. The camera became the watchful third pair of eyes, chronicling our characters and our frailties. It exposed us in ways that are uncomfortable and punishing.

In a culture where death equals failure and is talked about in hushed voices, dying remains deeply private and involuntary – often lonely and frightening. This experience with LuLu has made it less frightening for me, and made me keenly aware of the unfinished business in my own life. I hope The LuLu Sessions helps change our perceptions and sparks loud, passionate dialogues. I hope you use this film as an impetus to start your own no holds barred “turkey talks” with someone you love. Tell them you love them. Tell them you forgive them. Tell them thank you. Just tell them!

Ten years in the making, The LuLu Sessions is finally making its way through the film festival circuit. This film is my testimony about the sometimes annoying tenacity of love and our surprising capacity for pushing past limits - in love, friendship, forgiveness and life itself, in the face of impending mortality. This film is one of the first ever personal documentaries seen through the lens of a Chinese American, queer woman. Yet, at its heart, I believe LuLu binds audiences - straight or gay, Asian or not, man or woman, young or old - to the most universal of stories, that of love and death.

I hope this modern day "Thelma and Louise" meets "Tuesdays with Morrie", will prod all of us to wonder what our own final adventure will look like, and with whom we will we share this last ride.
S. CASPER WONG  
Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer

S. Casper Wong is a New York based writer, director and producer of both narrative and documentary films. Her narrative feature screenplay, OO1, a sci-fi love story has won the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Screenwriting Grant; the Grand Jury Prize for Best Screenplay at Urbanworld Film Festival and the Sloan Fellowship at the Hamptons International Film Festival Screenwriter’s Lab and is slated for production in China winter 2012. Her award-winning narrative short film, Shirts & Skins, had been screened internationally and was licensed to the Independent Film Channel for national broadcast from 2004 to 2007. It is now part of the Tribeca Film Institute’s curated Reframe Collection. Her screenplay, Lucy in the Sky, a feature animation space adventure, an Alfred P. Sloan Finalist, is in development.

She has represented Roger Corman’s first co-productions in China, overseeing two studios and a CGI Team, and serving as his Associate Producer and Second Unit Director in Palace of the Damned. Also in production is Staying Well, a feature documentary on Integrative East-West Medicine and the global health crisis. This collaboration with UCLA, is also being developed as a three-part television series. In post-production, is Becoming, a longitudinal documentary of Chinese adoptees in contemporary American families. The project began in 1999 when the subjects were three-years old. They were revisited in 2009 as they entered adolescence.

Prior to receiving her MFA in Film Directing from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts, she was Senior Attorney for IBM, specializing in international intellectual property and antitrust law. Casper also holds a J.D. from New York Law School and a B.S. in Bio-medical Engineering from Columbia University. She is a reiki master and an award-winning cartoonist. The LuLu Sessions marks her feature documentary debut.

LAURA MINNEAR  
Editor, Co-writer, Co-producer

Laura is an award-winning editor and producer who began her work in documentaries for series such as PBS-Frontline, Nova and The History Channel, after a diverse background in field biology/zoology, fine arts and one of her great passions, dance. Her recent credits include GIRL WITH BLACK BALLOONS (editor, co-producer), which premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2010 to sold out screenings, and was named one of the “Best of the Fest”. Directed by Corinne Van der Borch it tells the story of one of New York’s last true eccentrics, an undiscovered 87 year-old artist named Bettina who’s lived in the Chelsea Hotel for 40 years. BLAST! (co-editor) with director Paul Devlin premiered at Hot Docs 2009 and on BBC Storyville, and continues to air internationally and on
PBS. She is currently a producer/editor for Dan Rather Reports and was recently honored as the first person to win two Front Page awards in the same year from the Newswomen’s Club of New York. The stories we tell, whether on-screen or in how we choose to live our daily lives, still seem to her to be about the dance.

VI Key Personnel

S. Casper Wong  Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer  
Laura Minnear  Editor, Co-writer, Co-producer  
Tiffany Peckosh  Associate Producer  
Wendy Blackstone  Composer  
Michael Feuser  Sound Editor  
Andrea Bella  Sound Designer  
Jeremiah Morehead  Motion Graphics  
Emma Morris  Consulting Editor  
Jean Tsien  Consulting Editor  
Robert Hawk  Story Consultant  
Doug Block  Story Consultant  
Cynthia Wade  Story Consultant  

Advisory Team

Dr. Brookes Cowan  University of Vermont  
Linda Kahn  Linda Kahn, LLC  
Dr. Deborah Axelrod  New York University Medical Center  
Dr. David Muller  Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum  Congregation Beit Simchat Torah  

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Corporate sponsorship by  

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VII Festival Screening History and Awards
(as of 5/14, for up-to-date listing, please visit official film website, www.thelulusessionsfilm.com)

US TV Broadcast
America ReFramed documentary Series on PBS World Channel
US Premiere March 2014

Kitchener - Waterloo
Princess Twin Cinema – November 2013
Zonta Film Festival | Ontario, Canada
Opening Night Film

Taipei
Fuzhong 15 Theatre – October 2013
Taiwan Breast Cancer Foundation

New York City
Anthology Film Archive – October 2013
New York Women in Film and Television

New York City
Auditorium on Broadway, NY Institute of Technology – October 2013
Co-presented by Susan G. Komen Greater New York

Winnipeg
Gas Station Arts Center – October 2013
Reel Pride Film Festival | Manitoba, Canada

San Francisco
Ninth Street Independent Film Center – October 2013
Co-presented by CAAM and Frameline

San Francisco
Dolby Labs Screening Room – October 2013
Co-presented by UCSF / The Shanti Project / BAWFM panel

Los Angeles
Ronald Reagan Medical Center, Tamkin - October 2013
UCLA Shirley Hui Memorial & Susan G. Komen LA County Panel

Jakarta
Theatre Institute Francais Indonesia - October 2013
Q! Film Festival | Indonesia

Richmond
Performance Hall – July
Your Kontinent Film Festival | British Columbia, Canada

Brattleboro
New England Youth Theatre – March 2013
Women Film Festival, Vermont

Paris
Theatre de Menilmontant, France - October 2012
Festival International du Film Lesbien & Feministe de Paris
Taipei  
Shin Kong Cineplex Taipei, Taiwan - October 2012  
Women Make Waves Film Festival

Vancouver  
Empire Granville Theatre, Canada - August 2012  
Vancouver Queer Film Festival

Chennai  
InKo Centre, India - July 2012  
Samsung Women’s International Film Festival

Auckland  
Rialto Cinema New Market, New Zealand - June 2012  
Out Takes | A Reel Queer Film Festival

Wellington

Portland  
McMenamins Kennedy School Theater - May 2012  
Q Doc | Portland Queer Documentary Film Festival

Chicago  
Landmark Century Centre Cinemas - November 2011  
Reeling 30, The Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival  
WINNER Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature

Burlington  
Fleming 101 - October 2011  
Vermont International Film Festival

San Diego  
Mission Valley UltraStar Cinemas - October 2011  
San Diego Asian Film Festival  
WINNER Special Jury Prize

Copenhagen  
Cinematheque, Denmark - October 2011  
MIX COPENHAGEN | LesbianGayBiTrans Film Festival  
Nominated for Best Documentary

Seattle  
Northwest Film Forum - October 2011  
Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

Washington DC  
Goethe Institut – October 2011  
DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival  
WINNER Best Documentary  
WINNER George C. Lin Emerging Director Award

Atlanta  
Landmark Midtown Art Cinema – September 2011  
Out on Film, Atlanta LGBT Film Festival

Cambridge  
Arts Picturehouse, Queen’s Theatre at Emmanuel College - September 2011  
Cambridge Film Festival, UK

Austin  
Alamo Drafthouse South Lamar, Sept 2011
Austin International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Opening Night Film

New York
Clearview Chelsea – August 2011
Asian American International Film Festival
WINNER Emerging Director Award for Documentary Feature

Toronto
TIFF Bell Lightbox – May 2011
Inside Out, Toronto LGBT Film Festival, Canada
WINNER Second Place in Audience Award Competition for Documentary Prize

Boston
Museum of Fine Arts – May 2011
Boston LGBT Film Festival
Nominated for Grand Jury Award

Los Angeles
Director’s Guild of America – April 2011
Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival
Nominated for Grand Jury Award

Nyon
DOC Outlook International Market April 2011
Vision du Reel, Switzerland

New York
DocuClub Screening, Work-in-progress July 2010